

# Collective Worship Policy

## Introduction

Collective worship is a legal requirement in all publically funded schools. It should aim to provide the opportunity for pupils to worship God, to consider spiritual and moral issues and to explore their own beliefs; to encourage participation and response, whether through active involvement in the presentation of worship or through listening to and joining in the worship offered; and to develop community spirit, promote a common ethos and shared values, and reinforce positive attitudes.

## Background information

Collective worship is:

- an **educational** activity which is inclusive, involving pupils of any faith and none, as a school is a community of people holding different beliefs
- different from corporate worship, which is the shared experience of people belonging to a particular faith or denomination

It provides opportunities for pupils and staff in the school to reflect together on:

- what is important in life
- what it means to be human - exploring a range of beliefs and ideas and how the behaviour of some people gives an example of the best a human can become
- ideas of right and wrong - applying these to current personal, school and external issues
- what contributes to the way in which people live and work together as communities, both in school and beyond
- ways in which people in different places and times have experienced, responded to and expressed issues of belief and behavior.

Legal Requirements:

- DFES Circular 1/94 contains the current requirement for a daily act of collective worship, the majority of which should be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character that is "reflecting" the "broad traditions of Christian belief" without being denominationally biased. However, headteachers must take into account the pupils' ages, aptitudes and family backgrounds.
- This must be provided for all registered pupils of compulsory school age or above. The term 'registered pupils' includes those in the sixth form but not pupils in nursery schools or classes.
- The act of collective worship\* can take place at any time during the school day and with any grouping of pupils the school wishes to use (though not faith groupings).
- Parents in all schools have a legal right to withdraw their children wholly or partly from collective worship\*\*. Any such request must be complied with.
- The Education and Inspection Act 2006 makes provision for pupils in post-16 education to exercise the right to withdraw themselves from the daily act of collective worship.
- Teachers, including headteachers, have a contractual duty to attend assembly but they have the right to withdraw from collective worship and cannot be discriminated against for doing so.
- If a school believes that the Christian character clause is inappropriate for the whole school or certain pupils within it, application can be made to the Nottinghamshire Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) for a determination order to have the clause lifted or modified.
- In a maintained school it is the responsibility of the headteacher, in consultation with the governors, to see that these arrangements are carried out. In a Voluntary school, it is the responsibility of the governors, in consultation with the Headteacher
- Note that it is not the RE lead's role to be involved in organising or presenting collective worship. That is a separate responsibility.

\* Collective worship is **not** the same as an assembly, though can take place in the same gathering. A school may hold any number of assemblies each week, but **must** have a daily act of collective worship. Collective worship could additionally be held in class or tutor groups for a shorter period of time.

## \*\* Exercise of right of withdrawal

The parental right to withdraw a child from attending collective worship should be freely exercisable and a school must give effect to any such request. Parents are not obliged to state their reasons for seeking withdrawal.

The right of withdrawal from collective worship would normally be exercised through the physical withdrawal of the pupil from the place where the act of worship is taking place. Indeed the school could insist that this is the way the right is to be implemented. If, however, both the parent and the school agree that the pupil should be allowed to remain physically present during the collective worship but not take part in it, nothing in the law prevents this.

Experience suggests that, to avoid misunderstanding, a headteacher will find it helpful to establish with any parent wanting to exercise the right of withdrawal:

- the elements of worship in which the parent would object to the child taking part;
- the practical implications of withdrawal; and
- whether the parent will require any advanced notice of such worship, and, if so, how much.

## Legal basis

- DFES Circular 1/94
- The Education and Inspection Act 2006
- Academy Funding Agreements

## Equal opportunities implications

Good quality collective worship contributes significantly to pupils' equal opportunities within school

## **Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) Collective Worship Policy Guidance**

This document is offered to schools/academies in response to a number of requests from headteachers for guidance and support in this important area of school life. Its purpose is to provide schools/governors/headteachers with some basic guidance on the provision of collective worship in order to fulfil the legal requirements. It also contains some suggestions to help in the development of quality educational collective worship.

### **What is collective worship?**

Collective worship is:

- an **educational** activity which is inclusive, involving pupils of any faith and none as a school is a community of people holding different beliefs
- different from corporate worship, which is the shared experience of people belonging to a particular faith or denomination.

### **What does collective worship do?**

Collective worship:

- Provides opportunities for pupils and staff in the school to reflect together on:
  - What is important in life.
  - What it means to be human - exploring a range of beliefs and ideas and how the behaviour of some people gives an example of the best a human can become.
  - Ideas of right and wrong - applying these to current personal, school and external issues.
- Contributes to the way in which people live and work together as communities, both in school and beyond.
- Reflects ways in which people in different places and times have experienced, responded to and expressed issues of belief and behaviour.

By providing **good quality collective worship**, a school can build an inclusive ethos around shared purposes and values, which contributes significantly to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of each child. In doing so it contributes to a thriving learning community and to the development of an awareness of British Values. Worship defined in this way draws on literature, music, art, drama and other sources of inspiration and reflection for pupils and staff whose religious and cultural backgrounds are of any faith or none. In this way collective worship is inclusive not exclusive.

### **What is best practice?**

At its best collective worship in our schools will offer opportunities for the whole school community to:

- celebrate together and share common values
- develop a reflective approach to living and thinking deeply
- foster a corporate identity and build community
- affirm the individual and the community
- deepen every individual's capacity for emotional responses
- awaken empathetic responses
- look beyond the material and the physical
- share experiences and possibilities of the transcendent
- challenge and question their own thinking and the views of others.

It may include:

- pupils' contributions
- sacred and secular stories/readings
- dance/drama
- prayer/reflection/meditation/songs/hymns/music
- artefacts/natural materials
- visual aids/focal points
- film/video
- dialogue/creative silence
- visitors

### **A note about Prayer**

There is no specification anywhere about what collective worship should include. Where prayer is used it is important to ensure that:

- there should be no expectation that children will pray
- words introducing any prayer-like activity are given as an invitation rather than an instruction
- any invitation to pray is made for the benefit of those pupils for whom it is appropriate
- the use of silence gives space for prayer or reflection or both
- the words need to be owned by the speaker and/or grounded in a religious tradition
- everyone can be included in a personal reflection on the theme or story or words of a prayer
- there is an expectation that everyone will be still and listen to the words of a prayer, without expectation of participation.

### **A note about best practice for quality collective worship**

Schools are encouraged to ensure that there is:

- a commitment from senior leaders to the value of collective worship
- an allocation of an appropriate budget for resources and training
- thorough planning to meet the needs of the particular school, its learners and community
- educational use of religious and other material, ensuring variety in its form and presentation
- an open approach that gives pupils opportunities to respond without compromising them in any way
- every opportunity to interest and inspire pupils
- encouragement for all members of the school community to share in the planning and leading of collective worship
- an appropriate structure to indicate the beginning and end of collective worship.
- a briefing available to staff and to visitors concerning Acts of Collective Worship
- a statement on the school website on Collective worship in your school.

### **A note on the legal status of collective worship**

Collective worship has been a legal requirement in maintained schools since 1944 and for academies and free schools, is set out in their funding agreement. It can take place at any time of the school day, in any place within the school and with any age or school grouping of learners and schools are encouraged to take advantage of the flexibility this affords.

### **The law requires that all registered school age pupils take part in an act of worship each day**

These acts of worship must be “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian Character” for the majority of the time. They must also be “appropriate, having regard to the ages, aptitudes and family backgrounds of the pupils”.

Teachers do have the right to withdraw from Collective Acts of Worship.

In inviting the school community to worship, we have to be mindful of the varied backgrounds that the school community comes from and it is therefore never the practice of our schools to preach to or seek to convert. The faith background of all is to be respected at all times.

## **A note on the DfE circular 1/94**

States that collective worship is to provide **opportunities** for pupils to:

- worship God
- consider spiritual and moral issues
- explore their own beliefs
- encourage participation and response
- promote community/shared values
- reinforce positive attitudes

## **A note on Assembly and Worship**

Collective worship is **not** the same as an assembly, though can take place in the same gathering. A school may hold any number of assemblies each week, but **must** have a daily act of collective worship. Collective worship could additionally be held in class or tutor groups for a shorter period of time.

## **Further support and guidance**

It is intended that, over time, there will be further support and guidance provided.